

<b>11 November 2021</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Extraordinary Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Children's Social Care Performance – Quarter 1 2021-22</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> N/A	
<b>Report of:</b> Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst		
<b>Accountable Assistant Director:</b> Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Help		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Social Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## Executive Summary

This report provides information on the performance across Children's Social Care. The overall performance for the service is good and this is within the context of the COVID-19 and the lockdown restrictions which have been in place over the period; this report focusses on Quarter 1 of 2021-22 (April to June 2021).

This report shows that:

- Throughout 2020/21 there was a fluctuation in the volume of contacts received by MASH due to the impact of COVID-19 reducing during the months of lockdown, and significantly increasing after the easing of lockdowns. This is demonstrated in performance in the first quarter of 2021/22.
- Between April and June 2021, the number of The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) contacts received was 1,558 (easing of lockdown) compared to 1,061 between April and June 2020 (full lockdown). There has been a 47% increase in number of MASH contacts when comparing the two quarters.
- The numbers of referrals between April and June 2020 have seen an increase and is in line with the above data on Contacts. Between April and June 2021, the number of referrals was 677 which is an increase on 443 between April and June 2020
- As at 30th June 2021, 94% of children and families assessments were completed in timescale. Timescales have been consistently maintained at

over 90% and is evidence of good performance and is reassurance that children's circumstances and needs are well understood.

- As at 30 June 2021, 108 children were subject to a Child Protection Plan in Thurrock which has seen a steady reduction from 159 at the end of quarter 1 2020/21 to 135 at end of quarter 2 and 111 at the end of quarter 3 and has stabilised since quarter 3 2020/21.
- Since June 2020, there has been an increase in the number of cases being stepped down to Early Help. Between April and June 2021, 133 cases were stepped down compared to 39 between April and June 2020. As with previous performance around contacts and referrals this needs to be seen in the context of Covid 19.
- The Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) continues to support a shared understanding and management of threshold decisions. Children and families receive the right help at the right time and the response to family difficulties is proportionate to risk. Threshold is well understood and is resulting in the right children receiving a statutory service, and where cases can be dealt with by Early Help Services they are.
- Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 296 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 298 Care Leavers.
- Children and young people are visited regularly and the management of missing children is consistent and reflects good partnership with the police and Thurrock Community Safety.
- Work with health colleagues continues to ensure that there is a positive focus on Initial Health Assessments for children entering into care.

## **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1** That members review the areas of improvement in Children's Social Care and work undertaken to date to manage demand for statutory social care services.

## **2. Introduction and Background**

This report provides a summary of Children's Social Care performance for Quarter 1, 2021-22 (April to June 2021). It highlights key demand indicators such as number of contacts, benchmarking data and key performance indicators.

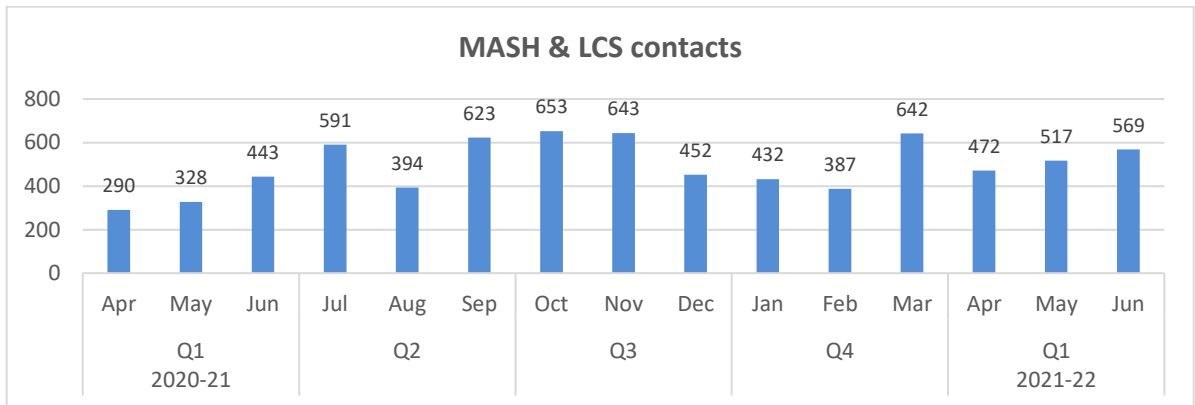
Thurrock produces a number of data sets and performance reports to meet its internal and external reporting requirements. The data in this report is from the 'At a Glance' monthly performance report, regional benchmarking data and national data sets.

This data has been presented and discussed with the Children & Families Performance Group.

### 3. THURROCK DATA

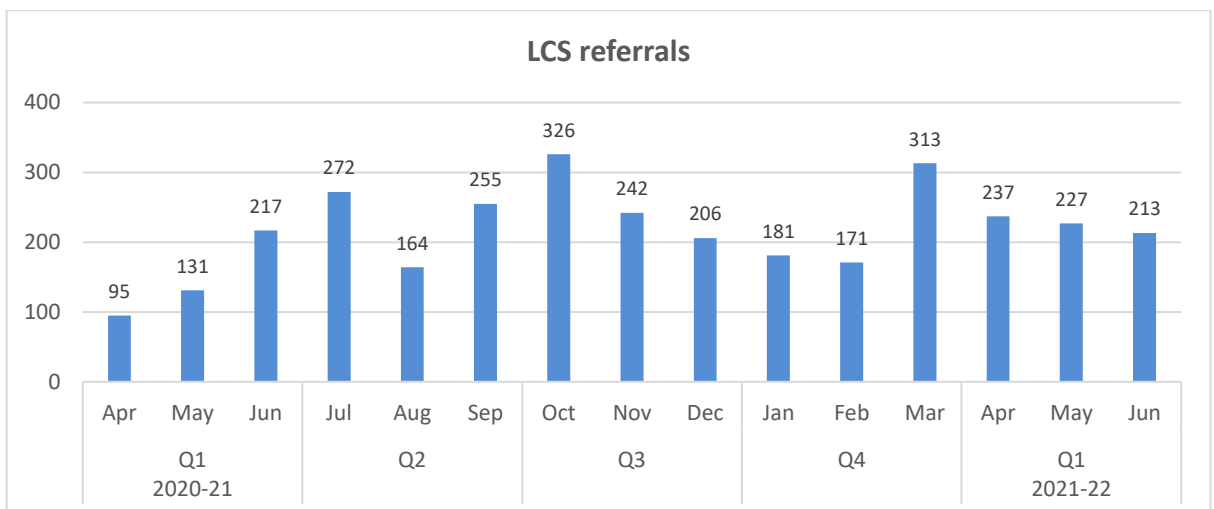
#### 3.1 Contacts

Between April and June 2021, the number of MASH contacts received was 1,558 compared to 1,061 between April and June March 2020 showing 47% increase in the number of contacts received when comparing the two quarters. It appears this is directly in relation to the emergence of COVID-19 and the subsequent national lockdown.



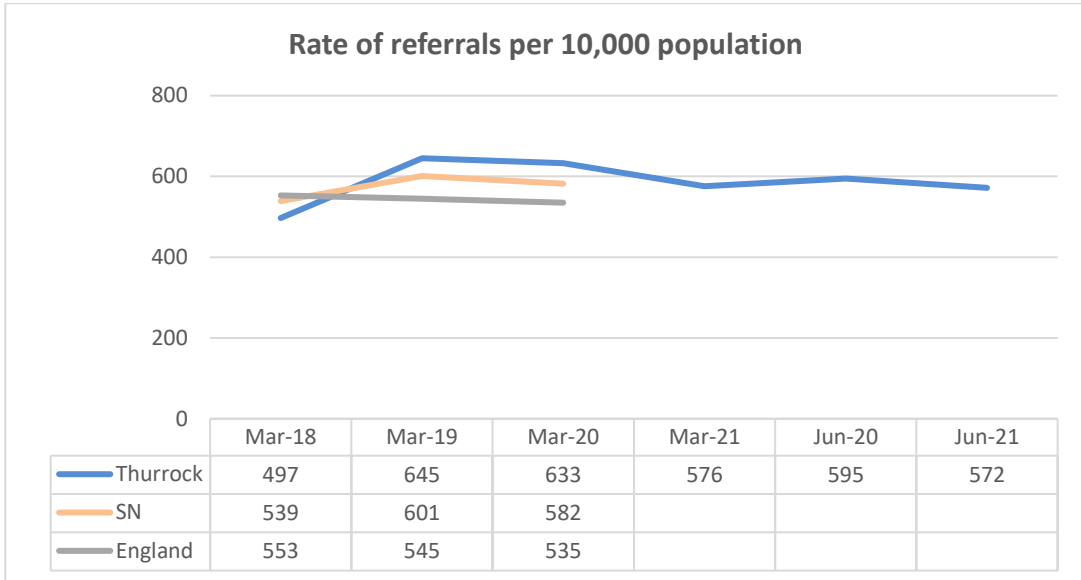
#### 3.2 Referrals

Between April and June 2021, the number of referrals were 677 compared to 443 in the same period in 2019-20. This represents a 53% increase in number of referrals which appears to correlate with the increase in number of contacts in the same period.



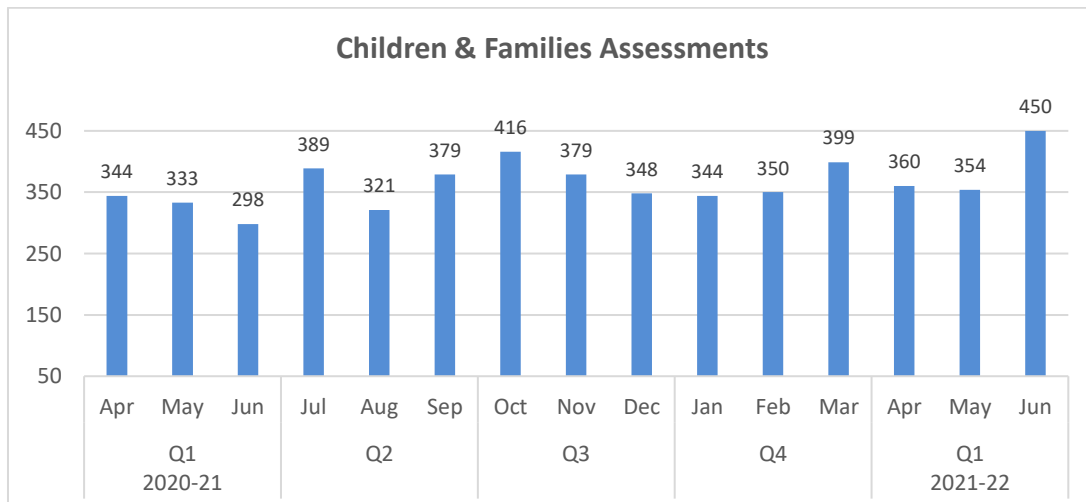
### Rate of referrals

As at 30 June 2021, the rate of referrals per 10,000 was 572 compared to 595 in June 2020. Based on benchmarking 2019-20 data, Thurrock is marginally below the statistical neighbor rate of 582, however, above the England rate of 535.



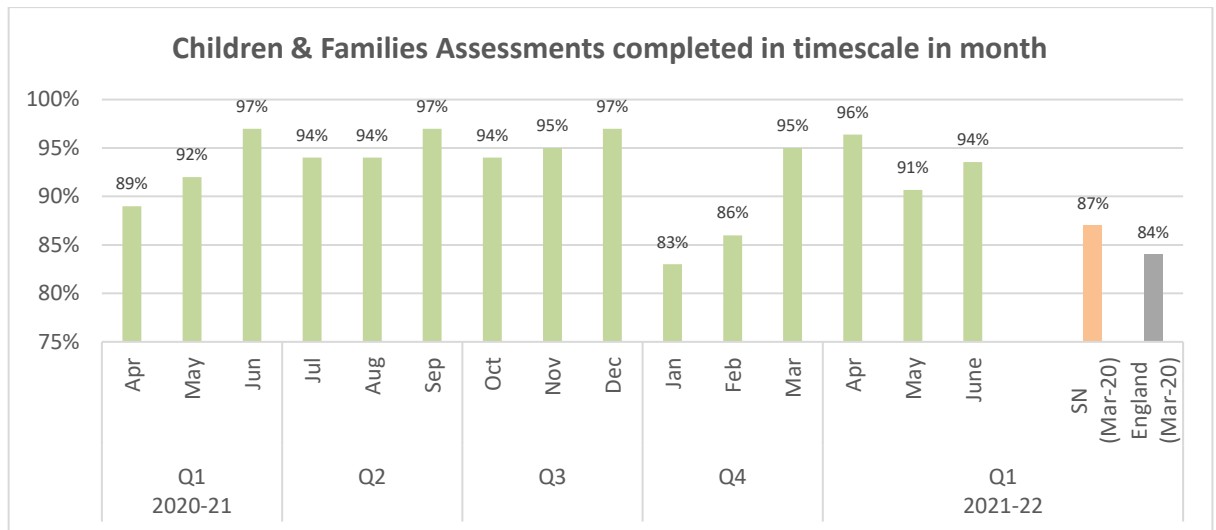
### 3.3 Children & Families Assessments

Between April and June 2021 1,164 assessments were completed compared to 975 in the same quarter in 2019-20. This represents 19% increase in the number of assessments completed between April and June 2021.



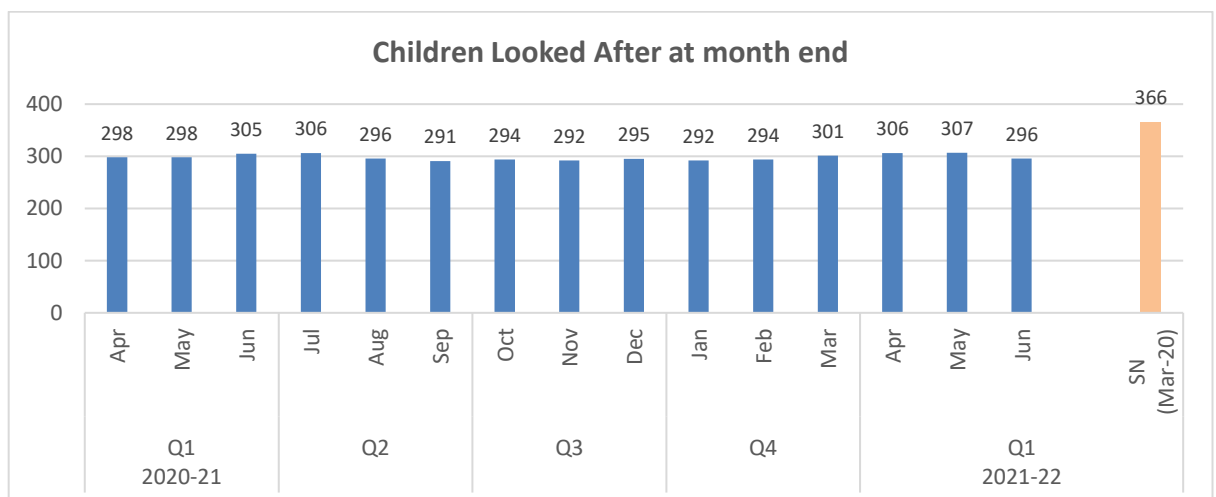
### 3.4 Children & Families Assessments completed in timescale

The number of assessments completed in timescale continues to show good performance at 94% during June 2021. The benchmarking data in 2019-20 shows that Thurrock is above the statistical neighbor average of 87% and England average of 84%.



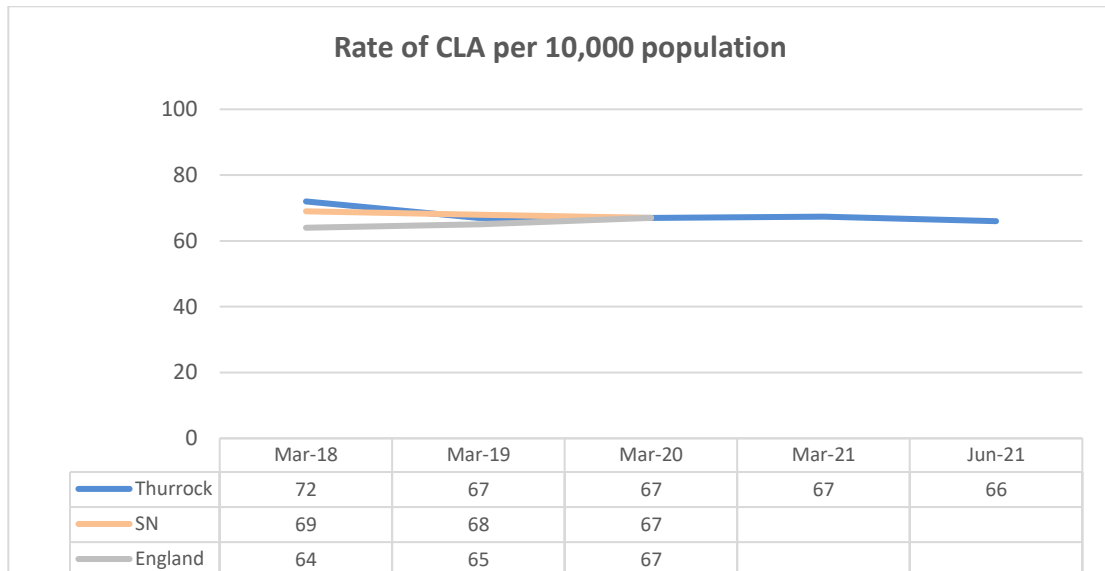
#### 4. Children Looked After (CLA)

The graph below shows the number of children who were Looked After at the end of each month. The numbers have remained stable and small fluctuations are normal and to be expected. There is monitoring of children who may need to become Looked After and there are regular reviews of children entering care. Where possible, children are returned to their family where safe and appropriate.



#### 4.1 The rate of CLA per 10,000 population

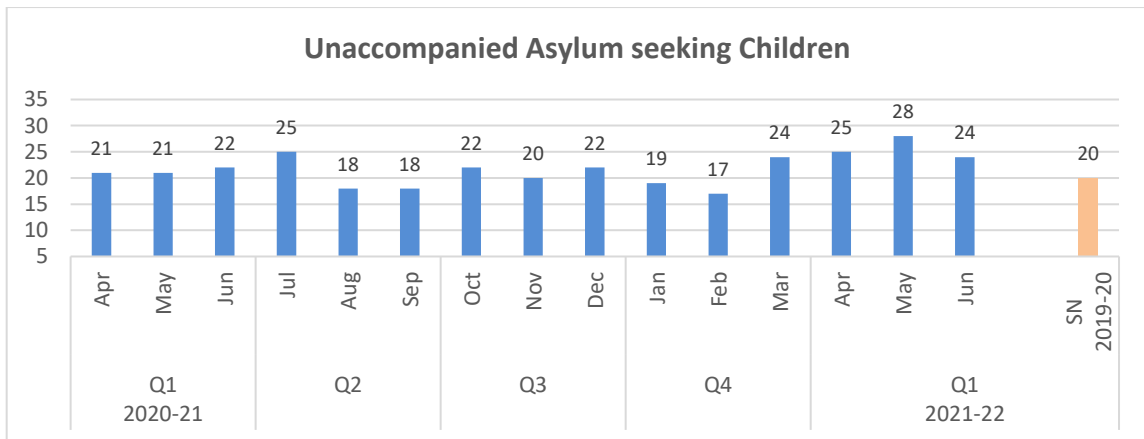
The graph below shows the rate of Children Looked After per 10,000 population of under 18 year olds in Thurrock. At the end of June 2021 there were 296 Children Looked After in Thurrock which shows a rate of 66.3 per 10,000 of children who are looked after. Based on 2020 benchmarking data, Thurrock is slightly below the Statistical Neighbour and England average of 67.0 as at the end of June 2021.



#### 4.2 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC)

UASC are a subset of the Children Looked After number above. Local Authorities through agreement have determined a simple formula to ensure a fair distribution of the responsibility for looking after unaccompanied children. Each local authority has a 0.07% ceiling for how many UASC and unaccompanied asylum seeking children a region or local authority is reasonably expected to be looking after at any time, as a proportion of its total number of children.

Thurrock's allocated number was 28, however, this has now increased to 31 children. There was a reduction in the entry of UASC into Essex Ports in 2020 to 2021 as the preferred route appears to have been through Dover. Between April and June 2021, there have been 12 new UASC arrivals into Thurrock. This has increased the CLA cohort of UASC to 24 in Q1 2021-22.



### 4.3 CLA missing episodes started

4.3.1 The graph below shows the number of missing episodes started and the count of the individual children who went missing between April and June 2021. Since June 2020, the number of episodes have remained relatively stable, however, the number of individual children that have gone missing has increased; this could be attributable to lockdown easing and young people having less restrictions in place.

4.3.2 The number of children who went missing April to June 2019-20 (pre-Covid) was 28 and 112 missing episodes which is more in line with 2021/22. There are 6 young people having 119 missing episodes which is a small fluctuation within the total number of children who are looked after. Between April and June 2021, the most common reason for children going missing was contact with family and friends, representing 44% of missing episodes.

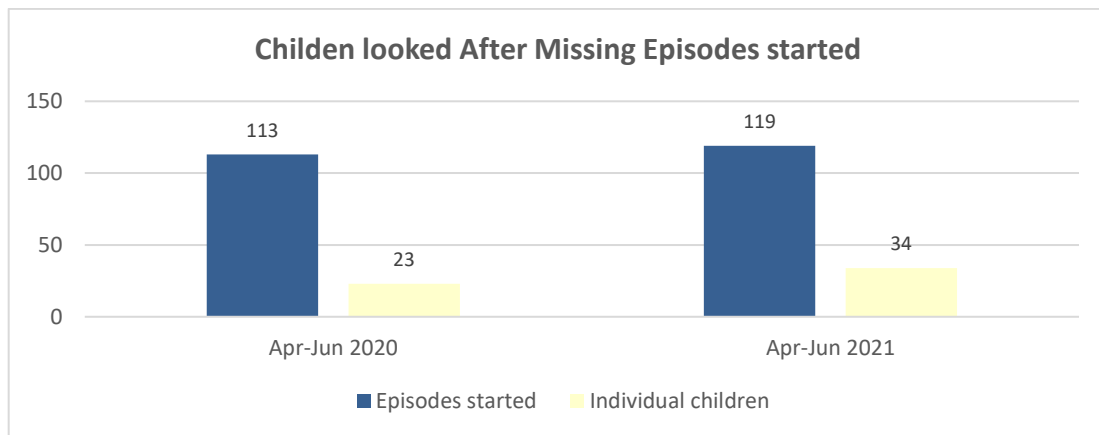
4.3.3 There has been a strong focus on Thurrock missing children and good joint working with the multi-agency partnership. There is a weekly missing meeting with partners that includes Essex Police and liaison with Thurrock Community Safety colleagues. A Contextual Safeguarding approach has been embedded which is assisting with the partnership working and social work practice. Ofsted completed a focussed visit in June 2021 and reviewed Thurrock's approach to the protection of vulnerable children from extra-familial risk, including children and young people who go missing. The Ofsted Report noted:-

'Cases involving children who are repeatedly reported missing are escalated appropriately to strategy discussions for further consideration of risk and protection needs. Risk management meetings maintain oversight of missing children, ensure the timely follow-through of actions and ensure that professionals appropriately share intelligence to reduce incidents of going missing'. (Source p.3 Ofsted Focused Visit letter August 2021<sup>1</sup>)

<sup>1</sup> [50167523 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

#### 4.3.4 The report also highlighted the good practice in relation to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children:-

'When unaccompanied young people go missing for prolonged periods, they are kept under review. In line with good practice, staff continue to make efforts to trace their whereabouts and follow up on any sighting leads. Checks are carried out with the National Referral Mechanism, the Home Office and other local authority areas, and new intelligence considered until their whereabouts are known'. (Source p.3 Ofsted Focused Visit letter August 2021<sup>2</sup>)



#### 4.4 CLA return to home interview (RHI)

Since April 2020, Inspire Youth Hub have been commissioned to undertake independent Return Home Interviews (RHI). All children are offered a RHI within 72 hours following each missing event, with the aim of understanding the young person's circumstances and the reasons why they go missing. Key Workers from placements, Foster Carers and Social Workers will discuss missing incidents with children. There is a network of support provided to children to try to engage with them and understand the reasons for their missing episodes. The Participation Team have been able to engage and seek feedback from young people and this has been invaluable.

4.4.1 The offer of an RHI is not always accepted by young people. The graph below shows the percentage of return to home interviews taken up by young people. During the month of June 2021, the take up was 40% by all young people offered a RHI.

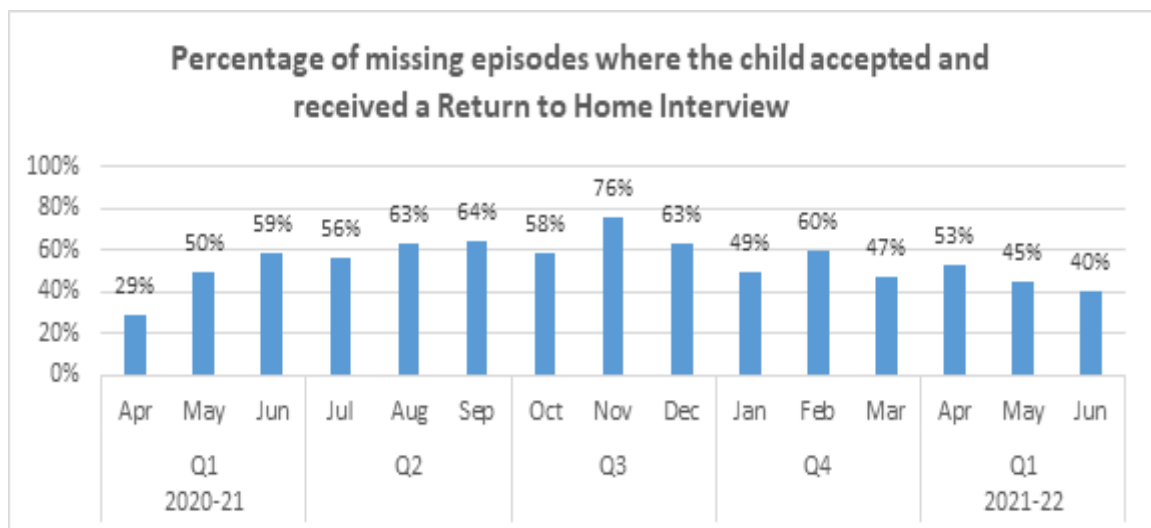
4.4.2 An area for development is ensuring that although the offer of RHIs is in place for all missing young people upon return, a different approach to the engagement of young people is being considered to improve the take up of that offer. RHIs are to be completed face to face by Inspire youth workers and with increased persistence, so young people can build relationships with the youth workers, who are independent to the young person's social worker.

---



'The Ofsted focussed visit noted the following in relation to RHIs 'All children are now offered RHIs. However, while the take-up of these interviews has improved and is currently at 58%<sup>3</sup>, it is still too low. Some children who are reluctant to take up the RHI offer benefit from direct engagement with their social workers after each episode of going missing. However, this activity is not formally monitored; neither is it evident for all children.' The recommended action from Ofsted relating to RHI's was 'To improve the involvement of children in the take-up of return home interviews and the information the authority relies on to capture activity and the impact of these interviews.'

4.4.3 Further work is underway looking at how we can engage young people in return home interviews. Understanding from young people what works for them, what the barriers are to taking up a return home interview and making sure that we are capturing not only return home interviews undertaken by Inspire, but also the information from visits by social workers and other professionals who may be working with young people.



## 5. Children Subject to a Child Protection Plan (CPP)

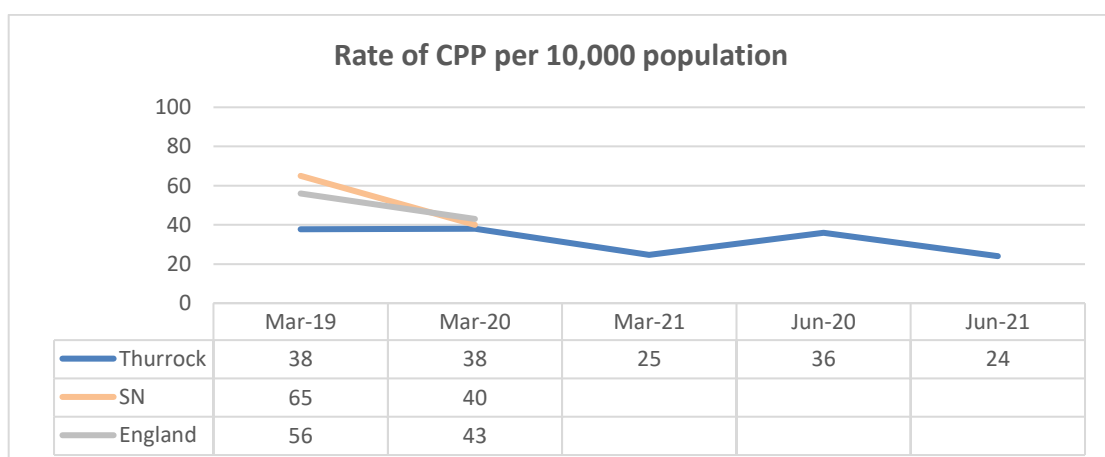
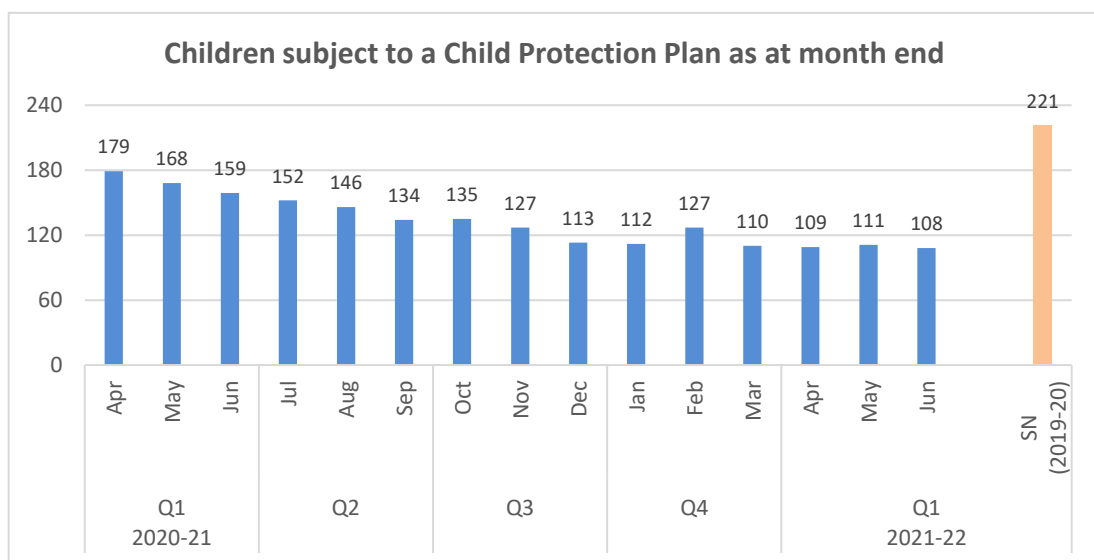
### 5.1 Number of Children subject to Child Protection Plan

- As at the end of June 2021, the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan was 108 compared to 159 at the end of June 2020. Since June 2020, we have seen the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan steadily reduce by 32% in June 2021.
- Based on 2019-20 benchmarking data, Thurrock child protection numbers (24 per 10,000) is below national (43 per 10,000) and statistical

<sup>3</sup> This figure was obtained during the inspection as a rolling 12 month total

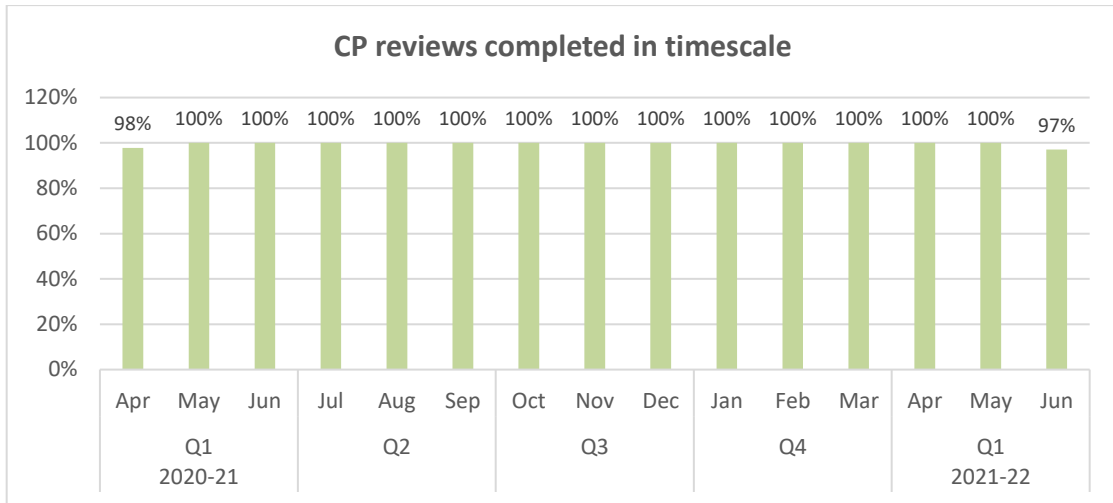
neighbour (40 per 10,000) averages but in line with Eastern Region neighbours.

- The introduction and further embedding of the Signs of Safety practice model which is strengths based approach to working with families and a focus on timely decision making for children has helped to reduce the number of children with a plan.
- Child protection numbers have stabilised since December 2020 which is an indication that measures in place are ensuring thresholds surrounding child protection intervention are being consistently applied.



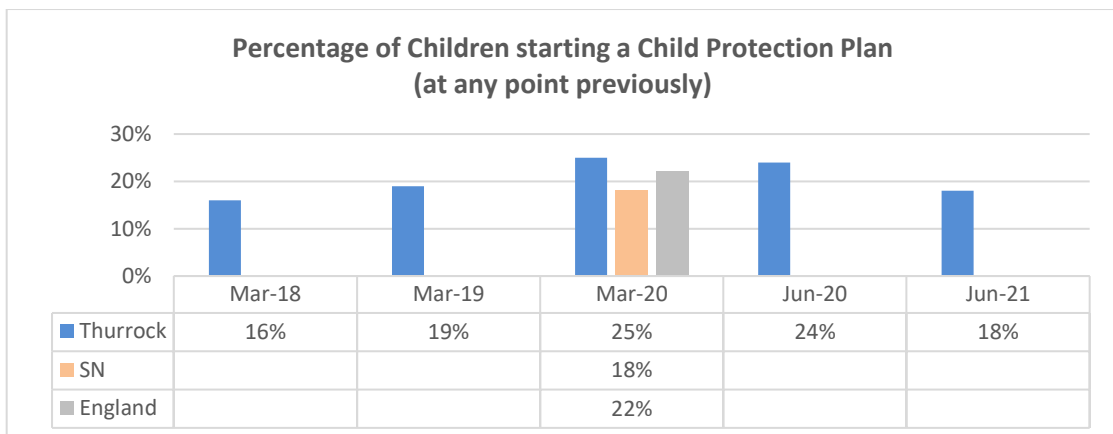
## 5.2 Child Protection reviews

Child Protection plan reviews completed in time continue showing good performance. In June 2021, 97% of reviews were completed in timescale. Compared to benchmarking data available, Thurrock is performing above the statistical neighbor average of 95% and the England average of 92%.



### 5.3 Repeat Child Protection Plan

As at 30 June 2021, the percentage of children subject to repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 18% compared to 24% in June 2020. As at 30 June 2021, the number of Children starting a repeat Child Protection Plan (at any point previously) was 28 children compared to 54 in June 2020 showing that the numbers have reduced by 48% when comparing June 2020 and June 2021 and is good performance. Based on the latest benchmarking data available in 2019-20, Thurrock is in line with the statistical neighbour average of 18% and below England average of 22% in June 2021.



### 6. Care Leaving Service

A Care Leaver, as defined in the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000<sup>4</sup>, is a person who has been 'looked after' or 'in care' for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who was in care on their 16th birthday.

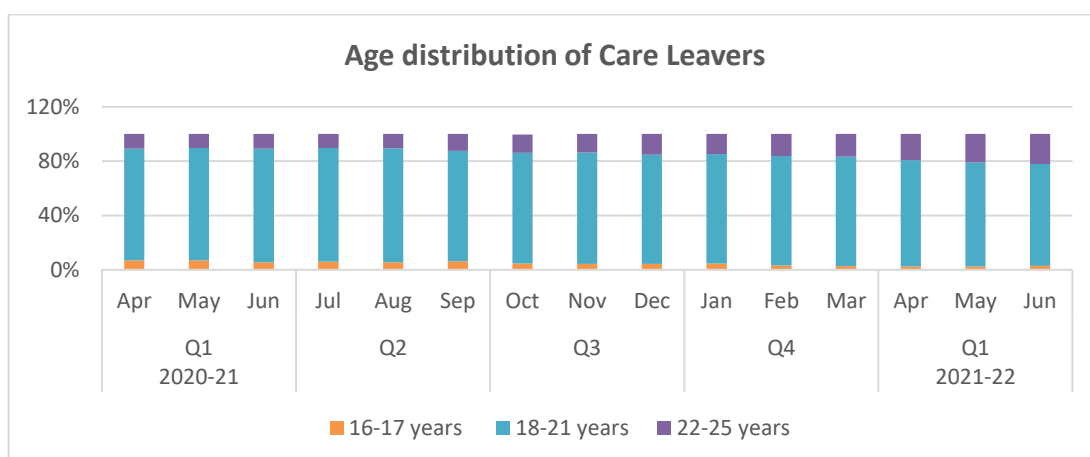
A young person's status as a care leaver can be divided into the following:

- Eligible child - a young person who is 16 or 17 and who has been looked after by the local authority/health and social care trust for at least a period of 13 weeks since the age of 14, and who is still looked after.
- Relevant child - a young person who is 16 or 17 who has left care after their 16th birthday and before leaving care was an eligible child.
- Former relevant child - a young person who is aged between 18 and 25 (or beyond if being helped with education or training) who, before turning 18 was either an eligible or a relevant child, or both.

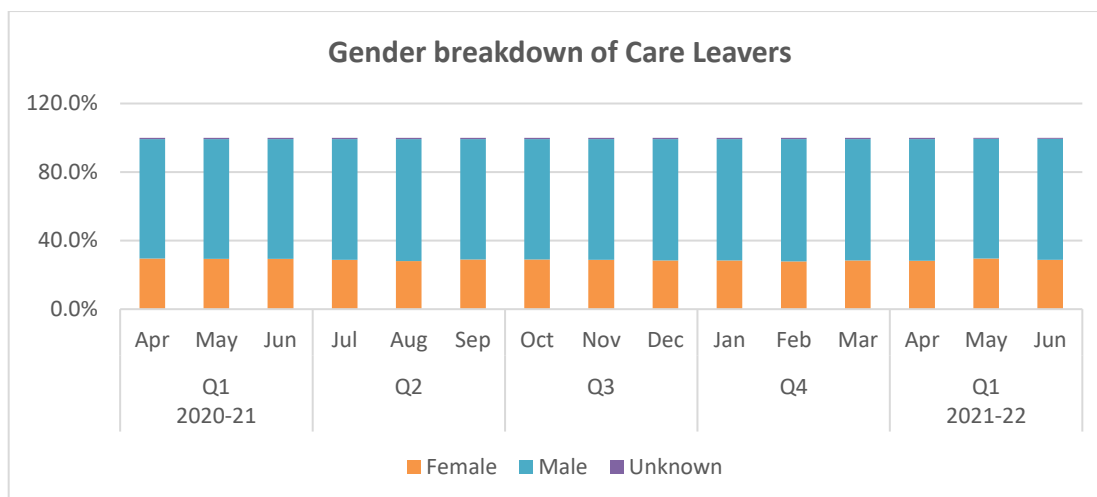
The graph below shows the total number of Young People age 16-25 years who are in receipt of a Care Leaving service. The numbers are increasing and this is in part due to legislative changes that placed additional responsibilities upon Care Leaving services (Children and Social Work Act 2017). Section 3 of the Act now requires Local Authorities to appoint a Personal Adviser for Care Leavers (who request one) up until the age of 25.

As at end of June 2021, 298 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25, under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

The charts below show the Care Leaver cohort broken down by age groups and gender.



<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/35/contents>



In June 2021, 298 Care Leavers were being supported and were receiving an Aftercare service. This is an increase from the previous year and this cohort now has a wider remit as all Care Leavers can request support services until the age of 25.

## 6.1 Employment, Education and Training (EET)

6.1.1 There is a focus on the needs of our Aftercare population to ensure they have the opportunities necessary for ongoing education, training and employment. At the end of June 2021, 49% of the Care Leavers aged 19 to 21 year old were in part or full time education, employment or training compared to 59% in June 2020. Compared to the statistical neighbour and England averages in 2019-20, Thurrock's performance was good in 2019-20; the decrease in performance for 2020-21 can be singularly attributed to COVID. The focus is on recovery and increased numbers of young people entering into EET, post Covid19 restrictions.

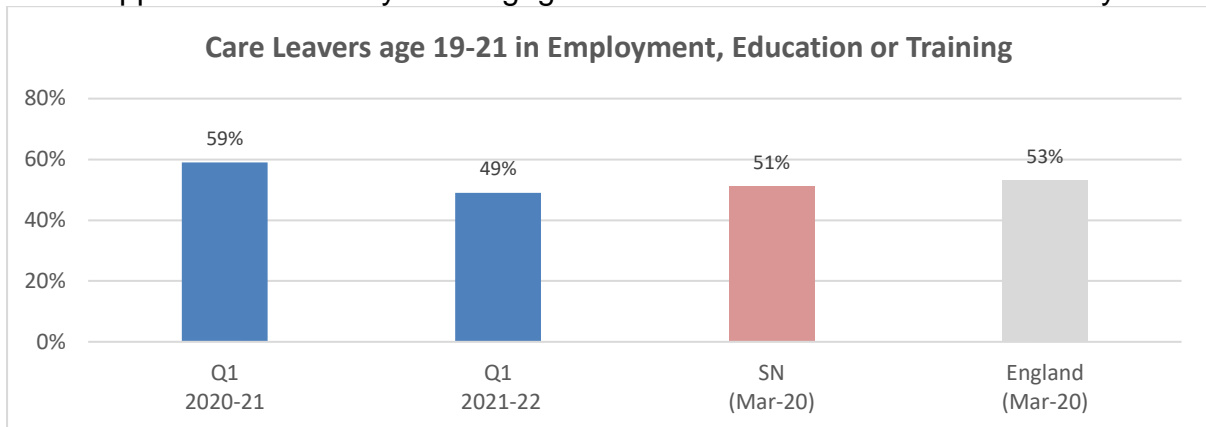
6.1.2 To strengthen oversight and planning to ensure our young people have support and opportunities for Education, Employment and Training (EET) there are two monthly panels which focus on pre and post 18 year olds who do not have an EET offer. These panels are attended by the Aftercare Service, Inspire Youth Hub and the Virtual School. The panel seeks to understand the issues for individual young people and align their interests to an EET offer. The panel discussions have highlighted the impact of Covid-19 on Young People which has limited opportunities to engage in work experience and continue with employment.

6.1.3 There is a close alignment between the Aftercare Service and the Inspire Youth Hub, a partnership which aims to bring about improvements in the number of young people in education, employment and training. The On-Track Thurrock Programme continues to offer a bespoke programme to ensure that Care Leavers can access education, employment and training. The offer of one-to-one support, face to face, from the Inspire Hub is

continuing (subject to risk assessment) for both emotional wellbeing and employment advice.

6.1.4 Consideration is being given to the participation agenda and a care experienced young person would benefit from an apprenticeship in this area. This could be funded from the Aftercare grant.

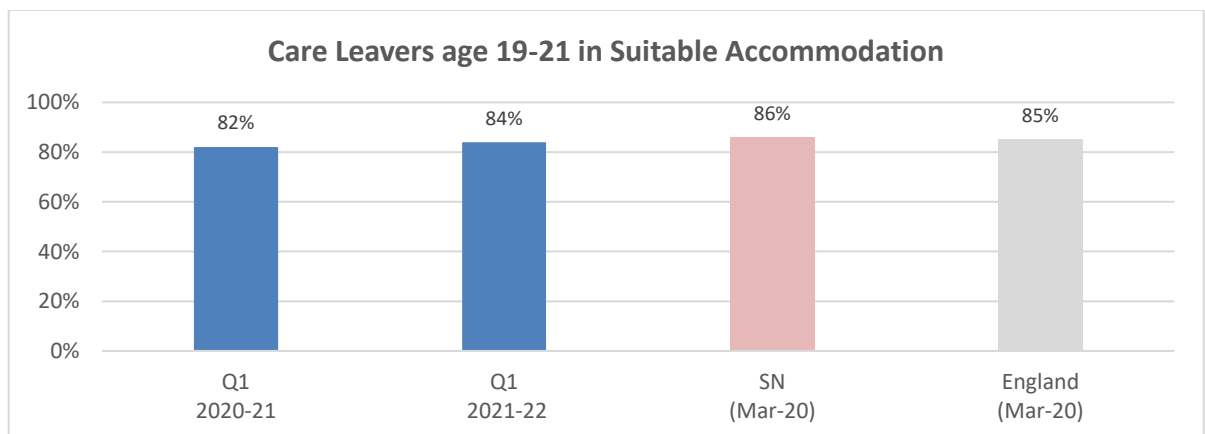
6.1.5 Thurrock offers access to the Prince's Trust programme, which enables young people to build their confidence and have access to apprenticeship opportunities so they can engage in the local communities in which they live.



## 6.2 Care Leavers age 19 to 21 years in Suitable Accommodation

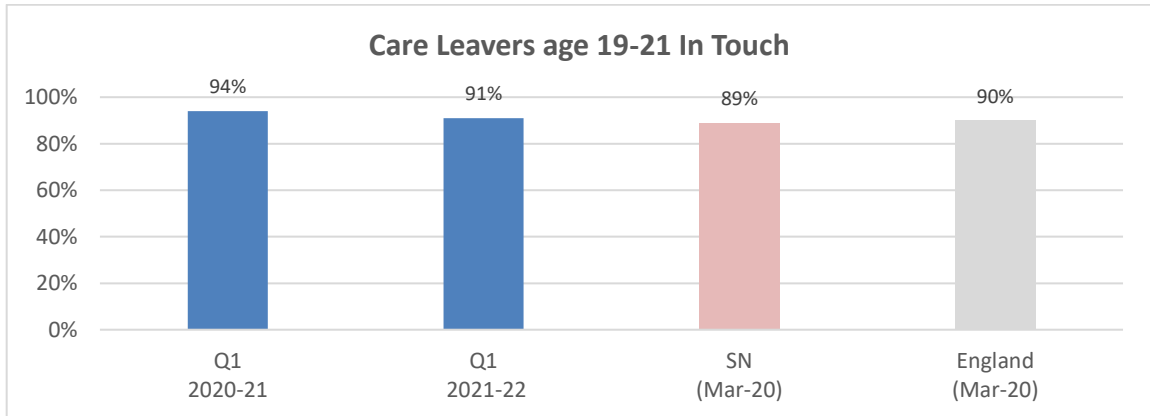
At the end of June 2021, the number of 19 to 21 year old Care Leavers reported to be in suitable accommodation was 84%. Thurrock's performance against bench marking data remains in line with the Statistical Neighbour average of 86% for 2019-20 and England average of 85% for 2019-20.

Increased housing support is being provided to young people by the Aftercare Service, Head Start Housing and Thurrock Housing Department. The 'Housing Offer' to Care Leavers has been updated with the Joint Housing Protocol 2020, ensuring good partnership working with clear pathways for young people to access housing, as well as ensuring they are prepared for their tenancies.



### 6.3 Care Leavers age 19-21 years 'In Touch'

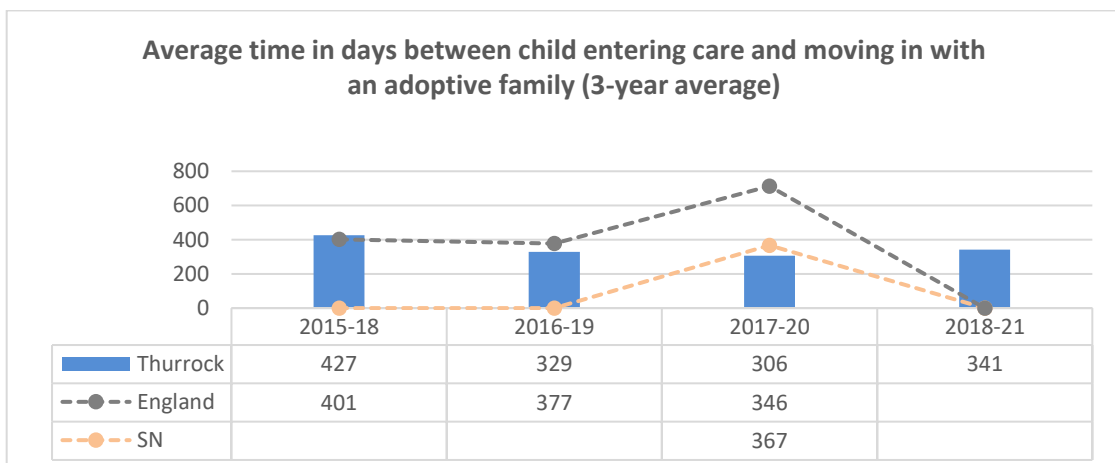
Local Authorities are expected to stay in touch with Care Leavers and provide statutory support to help care leaver's transition to living independently. At the end of June 2021, Thurrock was in touch with 91% of Care Leavers. Thurrock's performance is good with consistent performance above both the statistical neighbour average of 89% and England average of 90% for both 2019-20 and 2020-21.



## 7. Adoption

### 7.1 Number of children adopted

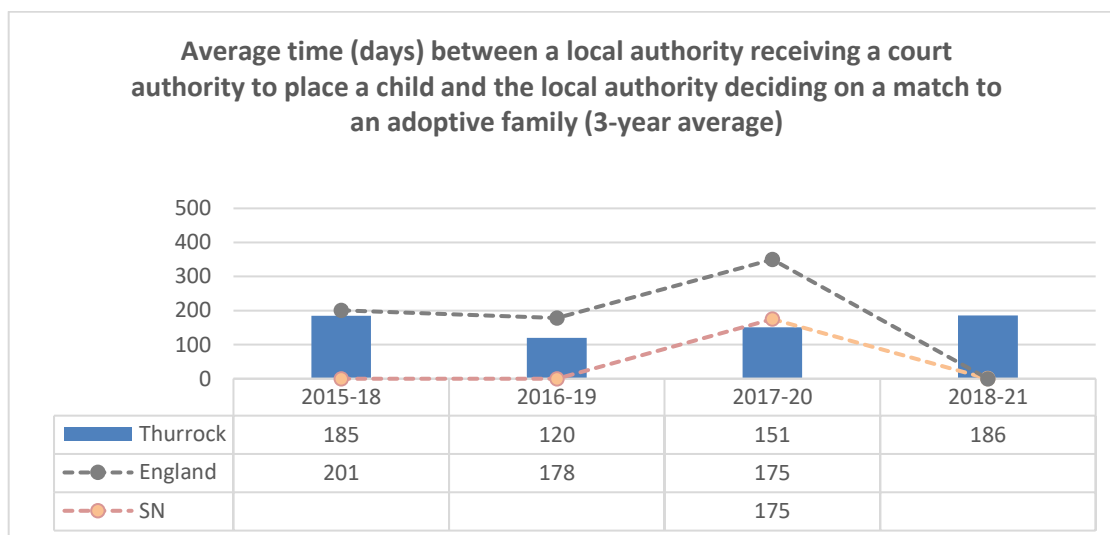
The timeliness of adoption is measured as a 3 year average, it is the length of time (in days) from the child entering care to moving in with an adoptive family. As at end of March 2021 the 3 year average was 341 days; this is below both England and statistical neighbour averages, which is positive.



7.1.1 When the above indicator is looked at over a 1 year period Thurrock is performing very well at 278 days against the England average of 375 and

statistical neighbour average of 355 days. Benchmarking data for 2018-2021 has not yet been published.

As at end of June 2021, the average time in days between Thurrock receiving a Placement Order (court authority) to place a child with the adoptive family was 174 days, this is lower than our 2018-2021 3 year average outturn of 186 days, which is positive. This is also marginally below our national and statistical neighbours of 175 days for 2017-2020. Benchmarking data for 2018-2021 has not yet been published.



7.1.2 This is an area for the Service to focus to ensure there is timely matching and placing of children with their adoptive families. The impact of COVID 19 will affect the timeliness of children being placed for adoption due to the delays in timetabling of final hearings for Placement Orders, and further delay as a result of birth parents re-applying to the court to revoke Placement Order, sometimes as soon as the Order has been made. The application by birth parents to revoke a Placement Order prevents the placement of children with adoptive families. There can be a further appeal if the birth family do not agree with the chosen adoptive placement. There have been, between April 2021 and June 2021, 5 children subject to Placement Order court appeals.

## 7.2 CLA permanency

Purposeful early permanency planning continues to ensure that children are in the right placement at the right time to meet their needs. Secure Placements where needed and supporting children, where appropriate, to remain at home with their families is the priority. Children are placed for adoption only once all family and friend options have been exhausted.

As at the end of June 2021, there were 54 (18%) children who are aged between 0-5, the total cohort of CLA being 297. The majority of children under five who are not able to return home, are moved on to permanent placements

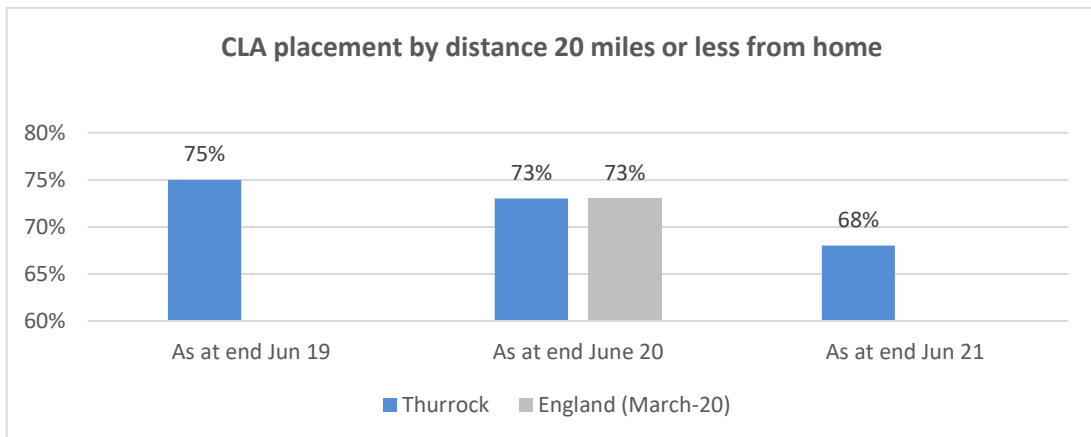


through adoption or permanent alternative carers. There have been significant delays, as a result of COVID-19, resulting in children being subject to court proceedings for longer periods, and transition to their permanent homes being delayed. There are 25 cases in court proceedings over 26 weeks and 6 of these children have a plan for adoption.

### 7.3 CLA placement distance

It is good practice to ensure that children remain within their communities. At the end of June 2021, 68% of the Children Looked After cohort were placed 20 miles or less from their homes, which represents 203 of 297 children. This falls below the latest national average of 73%, which represents March 20.

This is an area of intense focus for the Placement Service. The fostering recruitment campaign seeks to increase local placements. However it is not only Thurrock Local Authority who are finding the recruitment of local foster carers a challenge. Local placements are not available from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) or Residential care homes. There is a national shortage of fostering and residential care and the local authority has been seeking Ofsted registered provision and sometimes this is outside of the Thurrock and Essex area. In June 2021 there has been an increase of 14 children placed outside of Thurrock and at a distance of greater than 20 miles from their home, in comparison to June 2020. When extending the placement distance to 50 miles from home, for June 21, 240 of 297, 81% of children are placed within this radius.



## 8. Reasons for Recommendations

8.1 Children’s Overview & Scrutiny Board Members to note and comment on current performance position.

## 9. Consultation (including Overview & Scrutiny, if applicable)

9.1 None

**10. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

10.1 None

**11. Implications**

**11.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **David May**  
**Strategic Lead Finance**

No implications identified

**11.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**  
**Interim Deputy Head of Legal**

No implications identified

**11.3 Diversity & Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Smith**  
**Strategic Lead: Community Development and Equalities**

There are no direct diversity and equality implications arising from this report. However, the service does collect diversity monitoring data for looked after children, this data is given within this report. The data is utilised to consider issues of equality and to ensure that performance considers the impact on children with protected characteristics

**11.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children**

Not applicable

**12. Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Not applicable

**13. Appendices to the report**

None

**Report Author(s):**

Naintara Khosla, Strategic Lead, Children Looked After, Children's Services

Ruth Murdock, Strategic Lead, Quality Assurance, Children's Services

Clare Moore, Strategic Lead, YOS and Prevention, Children's Services

Sam Nour, Strategic Lead, Safeguarding, Children's Services

Anna Watkins, Business Intelligence Analyst, Children's Services